



Sermon Growth Guide

Author: Rev. Dr. Mateen Ellass

ROOM FOR THE SPIRIT | Romans 14:16-18

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Key Verse: Romans 14:17 - "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..."

Big Idea: The Kingdom of God is animated by the life-giving Holy Spirit, but that life grows and develops in an orderly way, guided by the character, wisdom and glory of God.

Foundations

Paul is still dealing with the controversial issue of whether meat offered to idols is permissible for Christians to eat. How does love navigate between personal freedom and concern for those in opposition? Paul lifts the vision of the Roman Christians to the higher plane of the Kingdom of God and underscores the foundational truth that God is ultimately concerned with eternal matters of righteousness, peace and joy, all of which are developed in God's people by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Understanding God's Word

Together read Romans 14:16-18.

Isn't it so easy to get distracted in life by disputes that ultimately turn out to be "tempests in a teapot"? Paul urges believers to focus on matters of eternal import. The Kingdom of God exists wherever God's rule holds full sway over His creation. As the Romans are tied up in knots over the "meat-eating" controversy, Paul exhorts them to realize that God's heart is not concerned with what they are "eating and drinking", but with whether they are cultivating righteousness, peace and joy through the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Paul uses this same argument with the Corinthian church. In their case, the issue has to do with talking the talk without walking the walk, spiritually speaking. Paul's admonition to them is, "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1Cor. 4:20). The goal for Christians is to pursue lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, focused on matters of eternal import and transformed into a character reflective of Jesus Christ.

Applying God's Word

Can you say in all honesty that "The Kingdom of God is more than issues related to..."

What you drink or eat?

Republican or Democrat Party?

Worship styles?

Tattoos and piercings?

Are you willing to let these and other secondary issues go in order to pursue fundamental gospel priorities? What issues do you tend to fixate on that take your eyes away from the Kingdom. How would you fill in the blanks, "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of _____, but of _____"?

Witnessing God's Word

Where do you see evidence of the Kingdom of God at work in the people and activities of First Pres? Where do you see secondary matters overruling Kingdom priorities in our midst? How could those missteps be rectified?

When the world looks at the Church (including First Pres), does it see a people whose priorities are aligned with God's vision as laid out in the New Testament, or a group of people who are not much different from any other group in society? What kind of testimony does our behavior convey to those outside the family of God? What if anything is the number one failure the Church needs to address to demonstrate that we are a people alive in the Spirit of God?

We are not here to introduce Colorado Springs to First Presbyterian Church; we are here to introduce souls to Jesus. To introduce those who do not know Jesus to the One who says, "I am the Christ you are looking for." It happens. It happens every time we gather. Or at least it can. I pray it happens more and more. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17) What more can we do to make Room for the Spirit? The Spirit of God does these things, these things that matter and last forever. What can we do to make more room for the Spirit? Do we need to push some clutter out, pull up some tent stakes, change some expectations? Let's make room for the Spirit to do his work.

We've all seen the Odyssey. Or read it. In Greek. Poor Odysseus. What keeps happening to him? He keeps waking up on shores he doesn't know. He keeps getting blown off course. He keeps losing his way. Sometimes it's his own fault, but there are also these terrible gods on Mount Olympus that just like messing with people. The first job when you wake up with sand in your eyes on a strange beach is to figure out, "Where am I?" Each year we take a Sunday to ask, Where are we? Where are we headed? How do we get there? Today is Vision Sunday 2026. Like Odysseus we want to wake up, figure out where we are, remember where we are going and encourage one another to get at it. Good news. We don't have terrible, childish, imaginary gods messing with us. We are the Body of Christ and he is our head. We are the Temple of the Lord filled with his presence. We are the ship of faith and our sails are full, the wind of the Holy Spirit guiding us home.

Where are we? First Pres has been at it 154 years. I have been here the last ten. We have come a long way. From eight hearty frontier Presbyterians to 3,000 in worship under John Stevens, to the missional, outward-focused ideals of Jim Singleton, followed by a long interim season to 2016. In 2017, we changed the Fellowship Hall into the Worship Center and attendance doubled in there. We established a beachhead for Christian creativity, the Creative Suite, and declared ourselves joyful culture makers, not copycats or combatants. Light & Life for the City emerged in 2019, The First Pres Way – 7 Values

in 2020 and we were at a peak of attendance not seen in over a decade when COVID came. We went to church online for a few months and limited seating for almost a year. We complied with the city and state. That frustrated some people, but we wanted to prove our church willing to sacrifice preferences for the population. People ask would I do it the same. Don't ask. Anyway, we had online capacities and did our best, kept a lot of people safe and continued the mission, and here we are five years later still wondering when we will be back to strength.

In ten years, we have endured political unrest, economic swings, a global pandemic and an internal Staff and Session reorganization with associated emotional storms. We wake up on the beach again. September 2026. That's what Vision Sunday allows us to do each year. Open the eyes. Brush off the sand. Here we are. First Pres is a strong and growing church. People are coming to Christ. Kids are being raised in the Lord. Worship is powerful and transformative. We are poised to make an enormous impact for Christ on Colorado Springs. We welcomed our largest class of First Pres Fellows this year. Twelve! Alumni of this ministry are out there changing the city and serving on church staff! Alpha class this winter was the largest I have heard of: seventy people. The Session made a commitment in 2023 to help us form a healthy staff culture. In 2025 we were certified for the first time as a Best Christian Workplace. In August, we polled the staff again and the results were even higher. First Pres Colorado Springs is listed as Best Christian Workplace for 2026, and we have moved from the 2nd percentile among churches in 2023 to the 64th percentile in 2026. Thank you for hanging in there and believing in us. It makes a world of difference! We have an installed Executive Pastor and are building a team around a solid vision.

Wipe the sand out of our eyes. Where are we? We gather 1600 strong, as five generations of believers, in two strong modes of worship with beautiful spaces, one glorious campus in the heart of downtown Colorado Springs, with zero dollars of debt and an infinite range of possibilities, under a Lord leading us into all he is calling us to be.

Is there room for the Spirit? Can we make more? This healthy staff is a buzzing hive of creativity. The Session Ministry Teams are becoming engines of ministry activity. We as a congregation are leaning forward with anticipation—"Lord, send us! Don't leave First Pres behind. Use this church to reach the lost of this city for the name of Jesus!" That's where we are. We are in a good spot. This is a good place to be. This is a good church to be a part of.

Where are we headed? I sat with Ed Stetzer for a morning along with some other leaders. He's a church consultant who runs data on trends in American church life. Churches like ours are headed in a good direction. We offer a few things others don't: more generational spread and also still able to offer families a great place to raise kids in the Lord. Classic worship that is spiritually alive along with thoughtfully modern services. A downtown location with safe and easy parking. Longstanding global mission relationships and a stable presence locally. Christians are hungry for historic churches with strong accountability structures, leaders of integrity and rich theology in the teaching. Larger churches are trending upward; people want just enough size to have excellent ministries but not too big to be left behind.

A friend in Christian leadership said to me last month, "We are looking for a church with some reverence. Night club worship has grown a little thin." I don't disparage the incredible impact of our sister churches in town, but I share that to give you some hope and confidence. Our worship on both sides of the house is not thin, showy stuff. This is real, soul-shaping, God-honoring, life-transforming worship.

The wind of the Spirit is in our sails. Paul told the Romans, hang on. The mission you are on as a church is not dependent on your abilities, your strengths, your Roman muscle or crafty ideas. You are the church now, the Body of Christ. "Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is

pleasing to God and receives human approval." (Romans 14:16-18) This project is a project of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Colorado Springs.

Where are we headed? I believe our best season as a church is opening up. We have the opportunity to shed more light from Jesus our Light on a dark world. We have room to rise in strength of attendance and involvement to previous heights and further. We are a place where souls are being saved. We are poised to make great impact for Christ on our city. If First Pres were not here, Colorado Springs would be a different place, a less Christian place, a darker place. We are headed to full potential again reaching Colorado Springs for Christ.

How do we get there? You have been handed a Next Steps Guide. We have changed the inside-baseball language of our discipleship pathway into language anyone off the street could understand. Our prior categories of Community Member, Participant, Worshipper, Disciple and Disciple Maker are now invitations to those on the outside: Be Known. Belong. Believe. Become. Bear Fruit. Our communications team continues to work to shape all our messaging for those who are not yet here. We need to make the next one hundred decisions for the next 1,000 people who have not yet walked through those doors. We can all help folks feel a part of this body. Reach out a hand to a stranger. We want to know one another better. Please stop by the photo booth and give us your picture for our church information. We don't do church directories anymore, but we are about to unveil a Digital Directory with opt-in or out capabilities to help us find and know each other.

Let's voice a few goals for the next year, then. Goal One: We will restore our worship spaces to fullness through three methods. (1) Prayer. This is a movement of the Holy Spirit. Pray that the Lord draws new believers. Pray that the Lord uses our church with all its foibles. Pray that the messages and conversations around First Pres are positive and used to draw hearts to Jesus. (2) Invitation. People need to be invited. Pay attention for invitation opportunities. Invite when a new series comes. Invite to the big moments like Christmas and Easter. Invite to special events. (3) Devotion. The most committed Christians in the U.S. are attending church a little more than once a month. Younger generations of Christians do a little better, like 1.9 times. God designated one day in seven to be set aside for the worship he deserves. Attention

to God is for his glory and your good. Press it, team. Set your calendar now with worship as a top priority. "I can't make it. I need to polish up my pickleball." Polish your pickleball later, after you've given the Lord what he deserves.

Goal Two: We are going to reopen a new Café 225 designed to bring hope. We want to make a positive mark on our corner of downtown and engage our city at its place of deepest pain. We are preparing to launch a Christian Counseling Center, bringing hope to young people in distress and into families struggling to find answers. A renewed partnership with Springs Rescue Mission will bring hope to men and women coming out of dehumanizing homelessness offering them experience as baristas in our coffee shop. Ministry to Palmer High School students hanging in that space will bring hope to the next generation. We will shape the future of Colorado Springs by stepping in directly where the city needs us the most. We happy warriors are about to strike a blow for hope in downtown Colorado Springs.

Goal Three. Our First Pres Forward initiative brought stirring insights to leadership about how to care for our church body better. Of the eighteen initiatives, half have been satisfied. The change is distinct. We are resolved to bring all initiatives to satisfaction over the next two years, releasing our congregation from past issues and freeing us up to grasp the future with joy and expectation.

We are under wind, at sail under the sustaining wind of the Holy Spirit. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17) It takes all of us leaning in. Pray. Invite. Devote. Be Fruitful. Be open. Be Light and Life for the City. The church is a city on a hill. Together we shine with the distinctive light of Jesus Christ.

Your soul is like the wick of a candle. A wick on the top of a candle can do nothing until the fire is brought. Then it doesn't strain to give off light. It just glows. You ask

me, "How do I run this program? How do I initiate this methodology to be light the way Jesus wants me to be light?" The question to ask is this: have you been lit by the fire of the Holy Spirit? A candle doesn't ask how to shine. It doesn't strain to put out light. It shines because the fire lit it up. A believer shines because Spirit of Christ has lit him up. Be saved. Be born again.

Romans gives us passive commands. Here is the command, "be transformed." The soul is a wick. Be lit. Then it isn't a question of how to produce light. The primary question is, have you been born again, do you know this new life in Christ? It isn't a program. It is faith; it is belief, and this belief, unlike any other belief, means you become a new man, a new woman, a new kid. Have you been born again? Does your life belong to Jesus? Then jump in with this movement of the Holy Spirit. Lean in and be a part of what God is doing here this year. Every hand is needed. The Belong Hub is open today, as every Sunday.

At the end of the story, Odysseus made it home, through a cascade of violence and bloodshed, but he made it home. We are on a journey, church, an odyssey. At the end of this odyssey it isn't my name or your name that will be famous. We are not the heroes. At the end of this journey, we will not say, "We did it." We will turn back and say, "The Lord has done it! And he has made us glad!" At the end of this journey, it is the name of the Lord that will be made great and will ring out in Colorado Springs and all the world and echo in eternity. The name of Jesus. Our Savior. All for him.